

Specific Objectives

The Foster/Adopt STARs (Specialized Training, Assessment, Resources, and Support) program is designed to facilitate the development of relationships between prospective foster parents and adoptive parents and co-trainers which promote the communication necessary for team building. This is accomplished through the content of the curriculum and the methods used to present the material.

The specific objectives of Foster/Adopt STARs are to help prospective foster parents and adoptive parents:

- Discuss realistic expectations of themselves and the agency;
- Identify their strengths and needs in fostering or adopting;
- Develop a plan to build on strengths and meet needs;
- Make an informed decision about their willingness and ability to work together to connect children with safe and nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime;
- Learn the purpose and goals of the agency's family foster care and adoption program, and its relationship to the other child welfare services;
- Learn about the selection process and the criteria for being licensed, certified or approved as a foster parent or adoptive parent;
- Learn the laws, regulations, policies and values that direct the agency's child welfare program in general and the family foster care and adoption program specifically;
- Obtain realistic information about the needs, and strengths, of children and their families who voluntarily or involuntarily require family foster care and adoption services;
- Learn about the role of foster parents and adoptive parents as effective and essential members of a professional team, including expectations, responsibilities, rights, potential rewards and potential risks, such as abuse allegations;
- Learn the differences between foster parenting and adoptive parenting regarding attachment, commitment, relationship with the children's families or origin, expectations, responsibilities, supports, lifelong impact;

- Learn the knowledge and practice the skills necessary to become a licensed, foster parent or adoptive parent;
- Learn about the diversity of families;
- Share similar and differing knowledge, ideas and values by participating in a group preparation program;
- Consider the impact of fostering or adopting on themselves, their children, and all aspects of their family life, including jobs, health and mental health, and financial resources;
- Experience the professional team as it operates within the agency, since the program should be conducted by experienced Children's Service staff assisted by experienced foster parents and adoptive parents who can model team work;
- Learn about foster parent associations or adoptive parent support groups that can provide valuable information, friendship, peer support, and advocacy;
- Develop admiration and respect for the role of foster parents and adoptive parents in caring for vulnerable children; and, with the agency, mutually;
- Assess their willingness and ability to become:

A foster parent who can:

- Protect and nurture children who have been physically abused, sexually abused, emotionally maltreated, abandoned, neglected and/or who have special medical needs;
- Meet the developmental needs of these children and address their developmental delays;
- Support the relationship between children and their parents, siblings and kin to the fullest possible extent;
- Help connect children to safe and nurturing lifetime relationships, with reunification with parents or kin as the primary goal;
- Work collaboratively with the agency as an effective and essential member of a professional team;

Or, an adoptive parent who can:

- Protect and nurture children who have been physically abused, sexually abused, emotionally maltreated, abandoned, neglected and/or who have special medical needs;
- Meet the developmental needs of these children and address developmental delays;
- Support the relationship between children and their parents, siblings and kin as appropriate;
- Make an earnest commitment to provide a child with safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime; and
- Work collaboratively with the agency as an effective and essential member of a professional team to adoption finalization.

Competencies and Learning Objectives

Competencies refer to the knowledge and skills necessary to complete a set of responsibilities. The competencies for Foster/Adopt STARs were developed by the "Developing Competencies Work Group" of the Illinois Foster PRIDE/Adopt PRIDE Steering Committee. They turned to the recommendations of the National Commission on Family Foster Care (convened by the Child Welfare League of America in collaboration with the National Foster Parent Association) as well as to other consultants. The result was the development of areas of responsibility or competency categories.

The competency categories for foster parents include:

- Protecting and nurturing;
- Meeting developmental needs and addressing developmental delays;
- Supporting relationships between children and their birth families;
- Connecting children to safe, nurturing relationships intended to last a lifetime;
- Working as a member of a professional team;

Adoptive parent competency categories were developed through consultation with additional adoption experts and include:

- Knowing how adoptive families are unique;

- Understanding the importance of separation, loss and grief in the adoption process;
- Understanding attachment and its importance in the adoption process;
- Anticipating and managing challenges as an adoptive family; and
- Making a lifelong commitment to a child.

From the competency categories, specific competencies were developed. Because some knowledge and skills are essential before children are placed with families and other knowledge and skills would be more appropriate for licensing, training competencies were organized into two groups - pre-service and core.

Pre-service competencies are the grouping of knowledge and skills essential for foster parents and adoptive parents before a child is placed. Foster/Adopt STARs addresses competencies only at the pre-service level. For example, a pre-service training competency for foster parents is: "Foster parents know that regular visits and other types of contact can strengthen relationships between children and their birth families."

Core competencies are the knowledge and skills that are more effectively learned after a foster parent is licensed, and a child is placed. Core competencies typically are those which foster parents acquire in their first two years of experience. An example of a core competency is "Foster parents are able to support visits and contacts appropriate to each child/family situation." Foster STARs addresses competencies at the core level.

As foster parents become more experienced, they will need advanced and specialized competencies. Advanced competencies build on core competencies. For example, an advanced competency is "Foster parents are able to demonstrate parenting skills for the parents of children in their care." Specialized competencies relate to a particular area of expertise, such as working with teen parents, caring for medically fragile children, or preparing youth for young adult living.

The competencies were used to direct the development of all of the in-session and at-home learning objectives which are included in Foster/Adopt STARs. These learning objectives directed the development of all the material included in this training program.

The Child Welfare League of America Standards for Family Foster Care (revised 1993) reference the competency categories presented here in Foster/Adopt STARs.

MEMORANDA HISTORY: